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Indiana's State House Design And Restorations

A History Of Indiana's Capitols

The Indiana Territory was carved from the Northwest Territory in 1800. Vincennes was the first seat of government.

As westward-bound settlers and supplies started to arrive in the territory via the Ohio River, territorial government was moved to Corydon, a short distance away.

Indiana became a state on December 11, 1816; Corydon remained the seat of government. The original State House, a 40-foot-square building, was made of Indiana limestone.

As more roads were built and settlement moved northward, a centrally located seat of government was needed. In January 1821 a site was selected and the city of Indianapolis was founded.

State records and the state treasury physically moved to Indianapolis in October 1824. State government was officially transferred to Indianapolis on January 10, 1825, when the legislature convened for its regular session.

There was no formal building in which to conduct State business. State offices were scattered across the new city in a host of houses and storefronts. Sessions of the General Assembly were held at the Marion County Courthouse.

A new State House was authorized in 1832. The building was completed in 1835 at a cost of \$60,000. The design was Grecian Doric and an Italian Renaissance dome

graced the building. It stood on the south end of the present State House grounds, facing Washington Street.

In 1867, the ceiling of the House Chamber collapsed. The damage was repaired, but unsafe conditions led to the 1873 creation of a New State House Committee to study the issue. In 1877, a Board of State House Commissioners was created to complete construction of a new building at a cost not to exceed \$2,000,000.00.

The Board held a contest to select the architect. Edwin May submitted a plan called *Lucidus Ordo* - Latin for "a clear arrangement." The Board selected this plan from among two dozen proposals submitted.

Design of the State House

At the time of construction, Indiana's State House was the most ambitiously planned state capitol in America. The architecture was influenced by the national Capitol. It is a classical Renaissance Revival style, using a cruciform plan with a central domed rotunda.

The legislative chambers were placed on either side of the rotunda. Opposite ends of the building housed the Supreme Court chamber and the State Library.

French influence can be seen at the corners of the building, which were treated as small convex-roofed pavilions.

Architectural details were classical motifs of the Neo-Greco style. Columns and pilasters were made of marble shafts with limestone and granite caps and bases. Floors, stair treads and wainscoting were made of marble.

Construction Dilemmas

A Detroit architect filed suit against the Commissioners in 1879, claiming that architect Edwin May had incorporated features of his design into the final version. Local architects conducted a media campaign in support of his suit, but a federal appeals court dismissed it for lack of evidence.

May died in 1880. His draftsman, Adolph Scherrer, was named to succeed him as supervising architect.

The construction project was originally awarded to Kanmacher and Denig of Chicago. Contractors who had unsuccessfully bid on the work questioned the qualifications of the contractor and the quality of materials selected. This led to a full investigation

by the House of Representatives. The allegations were found to be groundless.

The contractor lost a major financial supporter in 1883. Construction was halted, and the State House Commissioners declared the contract abandoned. New bids were solicited. Gobel and Cummings, also of Chicago, were selected to complete the building.

The State House Opens

The inside of the building was first seen by the public on January 6, 1887, when the General Assembly held its first session in the new State House. Work was still underway in the office areas, but the House and Senate chambers, rotunda, corridors and atriums were complete.

Newspaper accounts of the event were universally favorable. One anonymous letter from a disgruntled architect unfortunately gave later generations the opposite impression. It was published alongside a glowing account in the Indianapolis Sentinel, but it became the only period description preserved in files of the Indiana State Library.

Construction continued until September 1888, when grading and seeding of the grounds were completed. The final acts of the State House Commissioners were to issue a summary of their work and to officially close their accounts on October 2, 1888.

The final cost of construction was \$1,980,969.18.

Major Refurbishings

The State House remained largely unchanged until 1904, when the painted designs on the walls were redone in oil - to remedy darkening of the watercolors - and much of the woodwork was refinished. In 1906 the gilding was renewed on the dome lantern.

From 1917-20 additional office space was provided by conversion of the first floor stables into finished space. This 19th century parking garage had been entered by a carriage ramp at the base of the north steps. New doors and stairways at the east entrance and southeast corner of the second floor improved entry.

Electric chandeliers replaced gas/electric fixtures on the second floor, in the Governor's office, and in the legislative chambers. Openwork elevators were replaced with enclosed cabs. Wall designs were repainted in neoclassical style in

subdued shades of green, buff and yellow with red and blue accents. These were later painted out in a 1928-29 renovation.

The outside of the State House received its first cleaning in 1931, when steam was used to remove a black coat of soot presumably caused by the widespread burning of coal and the advent of the automobile.

The popularity of Victorian architecture plummeted following WWII. This led to a second major remodeling in 1946-48. Maintenance projects were completed that had been postponed since before the Depression. Electrical wiring was updated by installation of wire channels on the corridor walls. Aluminum and glass entry doors were installed at second floor entrances, and the monumental oak doors on the north and east sides were removed.

Cast iron lampposts were removed from limestone bases on the retaining wall around the grounds, and fluorescent fixtures replaced the 1919 sconces on the east portico. Coolers for bottled water were replaced with electric drinking fountains. The west steps were reduced in width to provide a new access to the first floor and to provide an entrance for disabled individuals. Corridor walls were painted a neutral pastel color.

In 1958 corridors were painted in turquoise blue/sunflower yellow. In 1964 the Governor's office was remodeled to eliminate the "loan office décor" installed around 1958. The exterior was sandblasted and the dome was painted with gold epoxy. The parking lot that had been established on the north lawn was enlarged, and fifty spotlights were installed to illuminate the building.

In 1968 a number of original corridor chandeliers on the third floor, which had been cleaned and rewired in 1958, were removed and replaced with modern fixtures. The same type of fixture was used to replace the 1917 fixtures on the second floor. The sconce fixtures on the spandrels of the atriums on either side of the rotunda were removed at the same time.

House and Senate Chambers

The most vivid change in the character of the State House was the remodeling of the House and Senate chambers in 1947-48. This was the first remodeling of either chamber since the original construction.

While the chambers themselves were very spacious, legislators lacked for office space in which to conduct business. In the remodeling, both chambers were closed in and ringed by legislative offices and mazes of corridors. Four floors of very small offices

were constructed behind the façade of each single-story chamber interior.

The inner chambers were decorated in a restrained neoclassical version of Art Deco style that included paneled wainscoting surmounted by murals.

The mural completed in the House Chamber remains today; the Senate murals were removed in a subsequent remodeling.

In 1966 the House chamber was once again remodeled, this time by replacing the blond oak wainscoting installed in 1948 with walnut paneling. The Senate followed suit with a colonial-style remodeling in 1974.

Both chambers have seen extensive renovation not in keeping with historic tradition. The desks in both chambers have accommodations for telephone and Internet access; the voting apparatus in each chamber allows legislators to cast a vote which all who are viewing the proceedings can see.

1988 Centennial Restoration

In the wake of the 1976 American Bicentennial, there was a renewed interest in America's heritage, including an interest in the preservation of historic buildings. The architectural riches of the Victorian era were rediscovered.

At the State House, this new trend found its first expression in the 1975 restoration of the Lieutenant Governor's office. In 1978, the dome was given its first new copper cladding as a part of the building's first major roofing replacement. In 1984 the art glass dome of the rotunda was cleaned and repaired.

Plans for a major re-creation of the State House to its original appearance began in 1986. This was a prelude to the Centennial Celebration of the completion of the State House and would be the culmination of Hoosier Celebration '88.

Four acres of plaster walls and ceilings were stripped, painted, and decorated with the original designs.

1,500 gallons of paint were used to recreate the original designs and refinish the area about the rotunda.

125,000 6" x 6" leaves of Dutch metal "composite gold" leaf were used for gilding the skylight, balustrades and plaster details.

124,500 square feet of interior marble and limestone were cleaned.

4.25 acres of Indiana limestone were cleaned on the exterior of the building.

31.5 miles of mortar joints were cut and repointed on the exterior limestone.

2,920 two-foot-square pieces of marble floor, approximately 1.1 miles in length, were removed and replaced for the installation of new electrical wiring.

45,000 board feet of white oak were used in woodwork, equivalent to 85 average trees. This included eight sets of white oak monumental entrance doors (four sets restored and four sets replicated); the stripping, rehabilitating and refinishing of 188 ornamented white oak doors and the replication of 26 more; four new white oak building directories; one new white oak guard station; and three new white oak and glass vestibules.

Red bronze door and window hardware, along with the wainscot rosettes, were rehabilitated or replicated. This included large rosettes (196 rehabilitated and 14 replicated); small rosettes (1,005 rehabilitated and 125 replicated); door hinges (396 rehabilitated and 457 replicated); state seal door knobs (321 rehabilitated and 107 replicated); and window pulls (248 rehabilitated and 92 replicated).

40 original brass chandeliers were restored and 67 were replicated. Each chandelier had 200 different pieces to be replicated or cleaned.

44 brass wall sconces were replicated.

266 new thermal insulated aluminum windows with white oak interior wood cladding and insulated glazing were installed.

16 colored glass windows were restored.

256 panels of the rotunda colored glass dome were restored and cleaned.

The rotunda colored glass dome was illuminated by using a reflective fabric structure above the glass with high intensity lights. The rotunda statues and limestone arches were lighted.

The total cost of the restoration was \$10,937,292.00.

For more information, or to schedule a State House tour, contact:

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Or visit our web site at: www.IN.gov/statehouse

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